

# Department of Human Services

Prepared by the  
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## Articles in Today's Clips Monday, March 5, 2007

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March 3, 2007

**Warren**

## Pregnant mom back in jail

Warren woman faces sentencing for infant's drowning

**Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News**

**WARREN --** A Warren woman awaiting sentencing in the drowning of her 4-month-old daughter in a bathtub in 2005 is back in the Macomb County Jail -- at her mother's request -- now that prosecutors have learned she is pregnant.

The baby is due around the time Angela McClellan, 26, is to be sentenced March 20.

McClellan's mother sought to rescind a bond she had posted, and Macomb Circuit Judge James Biernat set a new one at \$25,000.

An attempt by McClellan's boyfriend, Thomas Cadur, who is the father of the child, to post his trailer as collateral for bond was denied. Contacted Friday, Cadur declined comment.

McClellan pleaded no contest on Jan. 29 to involuntary manslaughter for the death of her 4-month-old daughter.

Police alleged she left her daughter in the bathtub of her mobile home on Dec. 13, 2005. McClellan said she went to get her daughter's clothes and, when she returned, she found her face down in the bathtub.

The baby, Victoria, was revived, but died Dec. 21, 2005.

### Bond hearing called

McClellan has been out of jail on bond awaiting the sentencing. When prosecutors recently learned from her mother that McClellan was pregnant, they called an emergency bond hearing because they were concerned about the welfare of the unborn child, said Steven Fox, assistant prosecutor.

"The underlying concern will be the safety of the unborn child and the potential risk of flight," Fox said.

By revoking the bond, Fox added there will hospital staff to care for the child.

### Custody to be determined

Once the baby is born, it will be up to the Department of Human Services to determine if McClellan will be able to keep the child.

Attempts to reach McClellan's attorney, E. Philip Adamaszek, were unsuccessful Friday.

You can reach Edward L. Cardenas at (586) 468-0529 or [ecardenas@detnews.com](mailto:ecardenas@detnews.com).

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## Grandma admits guilt to child abuse

Saturday, March 03, 2007

ALLEGAN -- A 50-year-old grandmother admitted Friday she failed to protect her 8-year-old granddaughter, who was sexually assaulted by the woman's son. Vendetta Rupert, who pleaded guilty to second-degree child abuse, faces up to four years in prison when sentenced by Allegan County Circuit Judge George Corsiglia on April 13. She is the fifth person to be charged in the sexual and physical abuse of several children in a Valley Township home. She said her son, James Rupert, abused his daughter. Her son and her husband, Ronald Rupert, are in prison. Melissa Rupert, James' wife, also accused of ignoring assaults on children, was sentenced to eight months in jail. A great-grandfather, Isaac Kelly Newton, was sentenced to 75 days in jail for possessing computer porn. Sheriff's detectives, who recovered thousands of images of child pornography in the home, called it one of the worst cases of child abuse they have seen.

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March 4, 2007

## MANHUNT CONTINUES

Police search for husband in northern Michigan after unearthing body parts of Tara Grant.

**Santiago Esparza, George Hunter and Francis X. Donnelly / The Detroit News**

**WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP** -- Stephen Grant is alive and on the run somewhere in northern Michigan, according to police.

A vehicle that Grant was believed to be driving was found Saturday night near the tip of the Michigan mitt by sheriff's deputies of Cheboygan and Emmet counties, Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel said.

Hackel told WDIV (Channel 4) that Grant called his sister around 5 p.m., and police traced that call to the Wilderness State Park area near the Mackinac Bridge.

"We haven't caught him," Emmet County Sheriff Sheriff Pete Wallin told the Associated Press from Pellston Regional Airport, where a news conference was scheduled for early Sunday morning.

"We have located his vehicle. We're doing an intensive search with assistance from the Coast Guard and our emergency response team. We've notified people in the area."

Michigan State Police said police were closing in on Grant at a cabin at Wilderness State Park, but Wallin would not confirm that, telling the AP: "I'm not going to tell you where he's at. He's in northern Emmet County."

Police have obtained an arrest warrant for Grant on charges of open murder, disinterment and mutilation in the death of his wife, Tara.

Late Saturday afternoon, Stephen Grant, 37, made two telephone calls, Hackel said. One of the calls was to his sister to check on his children, Hackel said.

Police discovered body parts thought to belong to Tara Grant in Stony Creek Metropark on Saturday, hours after a torso was found in her garage. The grisly discoveries were made in wooded areas on the outskirts of the park, Hackel said. "We had information that led us to this park," he said, without elaborating.

Hackel said police will resume their search of Stony Creek park at 9 a.m. Sunday.

"Most of the things we've been locating have been body parts," Hackel said. "They were in various locations. This is a very tedious process. The snow we recently had is making it difficult to search."

The torso discovered in the Grant home didn't show any stab or gunshot wounds, said Dr. Daniel Spitz, Macomb County medical examiner. He hadn't had a chance yet to examine other body parts.

Spitz said it would be a few days before he could find the probable cause of death. By that time, DNA tests also should confirm that the body is Tara Grant's, he said.

"There doesn't seem to be any trauma to the torso except postmortem, which was the dismembering," he said.

A week ago, police searched Stony Creek, but said they did not turn up any clues.

Sheriff's deputies, armed with a search warrant, detained Stephen Grant on Friday afternoon, but did not arrest him. Hackel said investigators could not further detain Stephen Grant after he allowed police access to the house, since he was not listed as a suspect at that time.

Police were watching Stephen Grant after they let him go, but Hackel said they backed off the surveillance at the request of Grant's attorney, David Griem.

After police found the torso in the garage of the Grant home, they conducted a door-to-door search of the neighborhood.

"Unfortunately, he got away," Hackel said.

Hackel said investigators found the torso about 7 p.m. Friday.

Tara Grant had been listed as missing since Feb. 9.

Hackel said he misspoke earlier Saturday when he said others helped Stephen Grant murder his wife.

"There's only one person who we feel is a suspect, and that's Stephen Grant," Hackel said. "Earlier, I said there are people who have not been honest or truthful, and that's a concern for us."

Hackel said Stephen Grant was driving a yellow 2006 Dodge Dakota extended cab truck with a Michigan license plate number of 9FLR57.

"A friend lent the truck to Grant without knowing what he was up to," Hackel said.

An emotionally distraught Stephen Grant called his attorney twice Saturday morning, said the attorney, David Griem.

In the two calls, one between 1 and 2 a.m., and the other between 3 and 4 a.m., he sounded suicidal. Griem said he offered Stephen Grant reasons to live, including his two children.

"It's my opinion that when he hung up after the phone call he was about to commit suicide," Griem said.

Griem has since made televised appeals for Stephen Grant to contact him but hasn't heard back from his client.

The attorney said he couldn't discuss what Stephen Grant said about his wife's death. He said he believed the calls were made from a pay phone but he didn't know where.

In addition to searching Stony Creek, investigators searched a wooded area near 29 Mile Road and Mound on Saturday.

Court documents related to the search warrant are sealed, Hackel said.

Hackel said the couple's two children are with relatives. On Friday, Stephen Grant's sister, Kelly Utykanski, told The News that she's been taking care of the Grants' two children, ages 6 and 4.

Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith told WXYZ (Channel 7) Saturday that Grant's children have been shielded from the attention the case has drawn.

"They're aware that their mother hasn't been around and at some point they're going to have to be told that their father will be brought before the court system and made to pay for this," Smith said.

"The (Department of Human Services) will be involved," Smith said. "The family will likely hire attorneys to bring children into their custody. We won't be involved with that. We'll be focused on bringing him to justice."

*Detroit News* reporters Amy Lee and Frank Donnelly contributed to this report. You can reach George Hunter at (586) 468-7396 or [ghunter@detnews.com](mailto:ghunter@detnews.com) The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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## Early-Life Factors Raise Risks for Adult Mental Woes

MONDAY, Feb. 5 (HealthDay News) -- A combination of low birth weight and childhood abuse boosts risks for depression, social dysfunction and other psychological problems in adolescence and adulthood, new research suggests.

A team from Mount Sinai School of Medicine, in New York City, analyzed data from the Johns Hopkins Collaborative Perinatal Study. That study had followed a random sample of mothers and their children from pregnancy for more than 30 years.

The children were categorized into four groups: those with low birth weight and a history of childhood abuse; those with low birth weight alone; those with childhood abuse alone; and those with neither.

The researchers then compared the groups in a number of areas: delinquency and school-related problems in childhood/adolescence; quality of life, well-being and socioeconomic status in adulthood; and selected psychiatric and medical problems.

The findings "suggest children faced with the adversity of low birth weight and subsequent child abuse had substantially poorer outcomes than children facing either adversity alone," lead investigator Yoko Nomura, assistant professor of psychiatry at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, said in a prepared statement.

This study, the first to examine this link, appears in the Feb. 5 issue of the journal *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*.

"The good news is [that] by offering preventative mental health services to mothers with low birth weight, and monitoring low birth weight children to provide early intervention, together we can protect such children from subsequent adversity such as abuse," study co-investigator Claude M. Chemtob, clinical professor of psychiatry and pediatrics, said in a prepared statement.

### More information

The March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation has more about [low birth weight](#).

-- Robert Preidt

SOURCE: Mount Sinai School of Medicine, news release, Feb. 5, 2007

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# **Lawmaker Pushes Child Care Rating System**

MIRS, March 3, 2007

Parents who want to put their children in daycare may have a new way to comparison shop if a new proposal becomes law.

The bill, sponsored by Rep. Kathy **ANGERER** (D-Dundee), would establish a ratings system similar to that used for restaurants and hotels to display the quality of services a daycare center, home, care facility or preschool provides.

Factors such as cleanliness, nutrition and education would affect a center's overall score.

"If I'm going to drop my child off in someone else's care for most of the day, I want to know that my child is going to get quality care while they're there," said Angerer.

Mark **SULLIVAN**, director of Michigan Community Coordinated Child Care, worked on the committee that oversaw the development of the ratings system for two years.

Centers would be ranked on a one-to-five-star scale.

Sullivan said that there are two advantages to the ratings system.

"First, and most importantly, it provides parents with an idea of the quality of care of the program they are going to put their child in," said Sullivan. "Second, it recognizes the efforts of day care programs to create a quality program."

Angerer said that since child care facilities are already observed and evaluated periodically, displaying that information in a way that is both understandable and beneficial to parents wouldn't take a lot of changes from what the state already does.

Yasmin **GREEN**, communications director of the Early Childhood Investment Corp., said that her group "applauds the efforts of Rep. Angerer to improve the quality of childcare in Michigan through the proposed quality rating system."

Green said that such systems have been implemented successfully in other states and it would be a great benefit for Michigan to follow their models.

"Angerer's introduction of the bill is a good indication that this issue is prominently on the radar of our policymakers," said Green, adding that its success depends on sufficient funding and proper planning.

Angerer said that children also would benefit from the competition that would arise as daycare providers take steps to achieve the highest rating.

The bill would also align with the governor's plan to focus on quality early education opportunities for all children, said Angerer.

Studies show that children in a high-quality daycare or preschool are less likely to repeat a grade, more likely to do better academically in school and more likely to go to college, said Angerer.

Other sponsors include Democrat Reps, Kate **EBLI** (D-Monroe); Lisa **WOJNO** (D-Warren); Paul **CONDINO** (D-Southfield); Aldo **VAGNOZZI** (D-Farmington Hills); and Gabe **LELAND** (D-Detroit).

The bill is pending in Families and Children's Services Committee.





Daycare Complaints Released  
Reporter: Beth Shayne

The daycare's been shut down since mid-January over the charges that Robin Wood molested two girls there, but the state's records on the childcare facility show no mention of any concerns about abuse.

One report filed in February 2002 complains two young children were left unsupervised in the yard with a gate open. A 2005 complaint alleges a baby slept on a couch and a bed instead of in a crib as the state requires.

DHS did not take action against the daycare in either case.

Robin Wood's attorney John Frawley argues those complaints are minor, considering Mary's Quality Daycare was in operation for approximately 30 years. ☐

"To have 2 complaints over that period is actually exemplary," Frawley says.

Wood continues to maintain his innocence on charges of criminal sexual conduct against two young girls. The prosecutor says he molested a 4-year-old girl and a 5-year-old girl who attended his wife's facility.

The investigator on the case says at least 10 people have reported inappropriate behavior, and that she'll ask the prosecutor to pursue more charges.

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March 3, 2007

## Caught teen faces felonies

If Macomb officials opt for adult charges, escape from juvenile facility may mean prison time.

**Jim Lynch / The Detroit News**

**CLINTON TOWNSHIP** -- Jordan Danski's brief celebrity as an escapee from Macomb County's Juvenile Justice Center ended Friday morning, and could end up costing him additional time in prison -- adult prison.

County officials will seek felony escape charges against Danski and the two other juveniles who activated an automatic door to flee Tuesday evening. Sheriff's deputies caught two of the boys within hours, but Danski remained at large for more than two days. Law enforcement officials caught up with him at a friend's Clinton Township home while he slept, Macomb County Sheriff's Capt. Anthony Wickersham said.

If they are charged as juveniles, the escape charges would likely mean no additional time for the teens. But if the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office opts to try them as adults, they may get more time and a change of scenery.

"It's in the province of the prosecutor," said Charles Seidelman, director of the juvenile justice center. "I'm sure it's an option he'll consider."

With the three juveniles back in custody, center officials don't intend to treat them differently than any other inmate who has violated the rules.

"They'll go to the rooms and have to begin working their way out," Seidelman said. Inmates typically begin with few or no privileges -- everything from later rising times to better deodorant -- and earn them with good behavior. Major rule violations mean starting from scratch.

During his escape, Danski or someone with access to his MySpace page posted taunts on the popular online networking site that he was "2 fast for the feds to cocky for the cops!"

Tuesday's escape was Danski's second from the juvenile facility in two years, a factor that may come into play when prosecutors charge him. He had been in custody on a charge of assault.

In 2005, Danski and three others broke out via a gymnasium door while the facility was being remodeled. All four were caught and returned.

The three fugitives may not be the only ones penalized for this week's events. "People that may have helped (Danski) would be considered for charges," county spokesman Phil Frame said.

After the escape, justice center officials immediately addressed the access issue that allowed the boys to activate an automatic door. In the coming weeks, licensing consultants from the Department of Human Services will conduct their annual review of the facility, which will include a detailed examination of security.

Karen Stock, a DHS spokeswoman, said the process should be complete by the end of March.

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## Youth home fugitive caught

### Teen left challenge on MySpace.com for police to find him

By Gordon Wilczynski  
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A Clinton Township teenager who evaded police for three days after escaping from the Macomb County Juvenile Justice Center was captured Friday morning at a friend's apartment in Clinton Township.

Jordan Danski, 16, who had issued a challenge to police on his MySpace Web site to "Catch me if you can," was found hiding at 4:40 a.m. in the bedroom of a friend's apartment just south of the St. Joseph Medical Center on 19 Mile Road in Clinton Township.

Danski and two other juveniles who escaped with him on Tuesday will be charged as adults, said Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith. He said they will be charged with escape from juvenile authority, a 4-year felony.

This is the third time Danski escaped from detention. In May 2005 Danski and Eric Schorling were two of four people who escaped but were quickly caught. Schorling made headlines in the newspapers two years ago for a knife attack on a Romeo High School student.

Since then, according to youth authorities, Danski was undergoing periodic evaluation but had not been progressing.

"Back in 2005 Danski was nameless and faceless and no one knew him and everyone knew Schorling," said Smith. "This time Danski is the main player and no one knows the other two kids."

Capt. David Teske of the Macomb County Sheriff's Office, said authorities got a tip on Thursday that led them to the Caryle Apartments in Clinton Township. There they found Danski and arrested him without incident.

Besides his "Catch me if you can" challenge on the Web site, Danski also proclaimed himself as "2 fast for the feds (and) to(o) cocky for the cops."

"We (his family) didn't know what was going on," said Brian Alvarez, 15, the friend who lives at the apartment where Danski was captured. "Jordan came here at 8 last night and asked if he could crash. I asked my mom and dad and they said OK."

Danski was laying face down when Clinton Township police and Macomb County sheriff's deputies jumped on him and escorted him out of the first-floor apartment. Alvarez said he heard Jordan yell "stop" when police arrested him.

While they were escorting him out of the apartment, Alvarez said Danski looked at him with a confused look on his face.

"He just kinda looked at me and I looked at him and they took him away," said Alvarez. "I didn't know the police were looking for him. He never said anything about that."

Escaping and being brought back to the youth home is nothing new for Danski. He and three other teens left the youth home in May 2005 but were caught. Danski was 14 years old at the time.

Danski was being held in the youth home for a series of offenses including breaking and entering an auto, possession of drugs and assault. Before he escaped this time he was going to be transferred to the Maxey Boys Training School, one of the most severe juvenile jails in Michigan.

Alvarez said he had not talked to Danski in many months. Alvarez said he considers himself a friend of Danski and both attended Wyandot Middle School in the Chippewa Valley School District.

"When he came over we talked for a while," said Alvarez. "He told me he got caught stealing some pop and went to live with his grandmother on Cimarron Street.

"But he had an argument with her and she threw him out. We played video basketball and then fell asleep. About 4:40 in the morning we heard some noise and my dad and I looked outside and saw about 20 cops outside."

Alvarez said the police were yelling that they would break down the door if we didn't open it.

Alvarez said police came into the apartment and asked if anyone other than family members were there. They went into his room and found Danski in a closet.

In the warrant for Danski's prosecution, Smith said it is an enumerated offense where the prosecutor's office can do an automatic waiver where Danski can be charged as an adult.

In regard to his blatant disregard for law enforcement over the Internet, Smith said it doesn't impact the charges against him.

"But it will impact our decision at sentencing," Smith said.

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## Cuts may close Hastings violence shelter

Monday, March 05, 2007

By Jean Gallup

The Grand Rapids Press

HASTINGS -- The only domestic violence shelter in Barry County is at risk of closing if a cut in state funding is not restored.

Green Gables Haven in Hastings, with an operating budget of \$216,000, lost \$75,000 in state funding last year. This year an executive order for another \$75,000 cut was ordered by Gov. Jennifer Granholm, but not approved by the Senate, said Executive Director, Christine Hiar.

"Right now, we're in limbo," she said. "We're the only domestic violence shelter in the state that has lost funding for the past two years. For a small, new organization, it's especially daunting."

Greg Bird, of the governor's budget office, said in 2006 there was no funding for the shelter. And because of the way its funding was set up, it was axed in 2007.

Hiar said there is strong advocacy for the shelter in Lansing by Sen. Patty Birkholz and 87th District Rep. Brian Calley.

The facility served 503 women and children since opening its doors April 1, 2004. Started as a grass-roots effort with \$100,000 in donations from private individuals and businesses, Green Gables Haven now has financial support from Barry County, the City of Hastings and 12 of the 16 townships in the county, with contributions between \$1,000 and \$5,000 annually.

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## Record child support collected

LANSING — The Ingham County Prosecutor's Office collected \$719,007 in back child support from criminal defendants in 2006 through its criminal non-support warrants program. This represents a 25 percent increase over 2005, and is the largest amount collected in the program's six years.

"Thanks to the hard work of the prosecution and Friend of the Court staffs, we have collected over \$2 million from parents who had previously ignored court orders to support their families," said Prosecutor Stuart Dunnings. "These funds are returned to the families, as well as to the taxpayers, who are often forced to support such families on welfare, due to neglect by the non-custodial parent."

The criminal non-support warrant program, which is grant-funded by the Michigan Department of Human Services, provides personal expenses for Assistant Prosecutor Heather Adamo, who is solely dedicated to enforcing child-support laws.

— *From the Ingham County Prosecutor's Office.*

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## Child-support telephone link repaired

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

**GENESEE COUNTY**

**THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION**

Sunday, March 04, 2007

**By Ron Fonger**

**JOURNAL STAFF WRITER**

A telephone hot line that lets parents receiving child support check the status of payments to them was repaired Friday after computer problems had made it inaccessible for several days.

Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services, said a series of problems, including a computer virus, caused the crash.

An official with the Genesee County Friend of the Court said the problem had been ongoing since at least Tuesday.

Although child support payments were not affected, recipients couldn't find out if the state had received payments that are forwarded to them, said Michael D. Morey, an administrator with the FOC.

The call-in system allows parents to find out a day or two in advance whether child support payments to them are about to be credited to debit cards or direct deposits into bank accounts, Morey said.

- Ron Fonger

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March 2, 2007

## **G.A.O. REPORT:** **MICHIGAN SECOND** **LOWEST IN** **UNINSURED CHILDREN**

Michigan tied with two other states in terms of having just 6.4 percent of children without some form of health insurance, the second lowest percentage in the nation, a report from the federal Government Accounting Office said.

The report looked at the states experience with the States Children Health Insurance Program.

S-CHIP is a program to help insure that children in low-income families that might not otherwise qualify for Medicaid can still acquire insurance. States have flexibility in setting income levels for families that qualify, and in setting co-pay requirements. Created in 1997, Congress is considering re-authorizing the program.

Financing of the S-CHIP program was a major worry of the nation's governors who met in Washington, D.C., last week as part of the National Governors Association meeting. The governors urged Congress to continue financing the program.

The [report](#) looked at state experiences overall in developing and using the S-CHIP program and pointed out various factors Congress needs to consider as it debates re-authorizing the program.

As part of that, the report looked at the total number of children insured through all means, including employer-provided health insurance.

Vermont topped all the states with the lowest number of uninsured children, at 5.6 percent of all children.

The Michigan, along with New Hampshire and Hawaii, came in second with 6.4 percent of all children in the state lacking some type of health insurance. Minnesota and Nebraska came in third with 6.6 percent of all children uninsured.

Texas ranked last, with 20.4 percent of its children uninsured, preceded by Florida with 17 percent of the children in that state uninsured.

Nationally, the average percentage of children in a state without some form of insurance was 11.7 percent.

The report also said that Michigan was one of six states that had a federal waiver to allow childless adults to participate in S-CHIP coverage.



**March 5, 2007**

## Without Health Benefits, a Good Life Turns Fragile

**By [ROBERT PEAR](#)**

SALISBURY, N.C. — Vicki H. Readling vividly remembers the start of 2006.

“Everybody was saying, ‘Happy new year,’ ” Ms. Readling recalled. “But I remember going straight to bed and lying down scared to death because I knew that at that very minute, after midnight, I was without insurance. I was kissing away a bad year of [cancer](#). But I was getting ready to open up to a door of hell.”

Ms. Readling, a 50-year-old real estate agent, is one of nearly 47 million people in America with no health insurance.

Increasingly, the problem affects middle-class people like Ms. Readling, who said she made about \$60,000 last year. As an independent contractor, like many real estate agents, Ms. Readling does not receive health benefits from an employer. She tried to buy a policy in the individual insurance market, but — having had cancer — could not obtain coverage, except at a price exceeding \$27,000 a year, which was more than she could pay.

“I don’t know which was worse, being told that I had cancer or finding that I could not get insurance,” Ms. Readling (pronounced RED-ling) said in an interview in her office, near the tree-lined streets and stately old homes of this city in the Piedmont region of North Carolina.

It is well known that the ranks of the uninsured have been swelling; federal figures show an increase of 6.8 million since 2000.

But the surprise is that the uninsured are not necessarily the poor, the unemployed and the undocumented. Solidly middle-class people like Ms. Readling are one of the fastest growing subgroups.

And that is one reason, according to a recent New York Times/CBS News poll, that the problems of the uninsured have jumped to the top of the domestic political agenda in Washington and on the campaign trail.

Today, more than one-third of the uninsured — 17 million of the nearly 47 million — have family incomes of \$40,000 or more, according to the Employee Benefit Research Institute, a nonpartisan organization. More than two-thirds of the uninsured are in households with at least one full-time worker.

Ms. Readling’s experience is typical; people who have had serious illnesses often have difficulty obtaining insurance. If coverage is available, the premiums are often more than they can afford.

While the government does not have an official definition of “middle class,” one commonly used point of reference is the median household income, which was \$46,326 in 2005.

Katherine Swartz, a professor of health policy and economics at Harvard, said the soaring cost of health care was a major reason

for the increase in the number of uninsured. She said it also reflected long-term changes in the economy, like the decline in manufacturing jobs and the growth in the share of workers in service industries and small businesses, which are less likely to provide health benefits.

Moreover, Ms. Swartz said, "Companies have become more aggressive in hiring people as temporary or contract workers with no fringe benefits."

The [National Association of Realtors](#) says 28 percent of its 1.3 million members are without health insurance.

"Because real estate agents are independent contractors, they are forced into the individual insurance market, where there is no negotiating or leverage," said Pat V. Combs, president of the association.

As an independent contractor with a Century 21 real estate brokerage, Ms. Readling had bought insurance on her own, a temporary extension of coverage from a prior job. But she was unable to renew it after she had surgery for [breast cancer](#) in 2005. Most insurers would not offer her coverage, she said, and one carrier quoted a price of \$2,300 a month for coverage with a deductible of \$5,000 a year.

Concerns about health insurance permeate her life.

To save money, Ms. Readling said, she defers visits to the doctor and stretches out her cancer medication, which costs her about \$300 a month. She takes the tiny pills three or four times a week, rather than seven days a week as prescribed.

"I really try to stay away from the doctor because I am so scared of what everything will cost," said Ms. Readling, who is divorced and has twin 18-year-old sons. Before every doctor's visit and test, she asks, "How much are you going to charge me?" She says she tries to arrange "the best deals I can." But in many cases, the price is still unaffordable, and "I have to do without."

Even those with insurance have reason to be concerned, economists say, because they end up paying for the uninsured in various ways. Some of the costs are also passed on to taxpayers and employers. To help cover the cost of treating the uninsured, hospitals often increase charges to other patients. Insurers then increase premiums for companies that provide health benefits, and they in turn shift some costs to employees.

Ms. Readling is engaged to be married in June, to another real estate agent. But she said she may postpone the wedding because she would not want her husband to be legally responsible for her medical bills.

"I am scared to get married because I don't have insurance," Ms. Readling said. "If I have to go to the hospital and I can't pay my hospital bills, what happens? Do they go after him? Can they take your home?"

To collect unpaid medical bills, health care providers often obtain judgments against a patient's spouse, as well as the patient, and file liens against their homes. Ms. Readling says she does not own a house, but her fiancé does.

The idea of universal coverage, in the form proposed by President [Bill Clinton](#), proved politically untenable. Since the Clinton plan collapsed in 1994, the politics of health care have changed because of the steady rise in health costs, the increase in the number of uninsured and the erosion of employer-sponsored insurance. Politicians are once again speaking about universal coverage as a goal, though opinion polls show that many voters still oppose the idea of a government-run health care system.

Ms. Readling said it was stressful enough visiting doctors every few months for her cancer follow-ups. Without coverage, she said, the experience is even more stressful.

“When you go to any medical person and they ask for your insurance card, you are so ashamed because you have to say, ‘I don’t have insurance,’ ” Ms. Readling said. “You just feel like you are dirt.”

Ms. Readling said she often woke up at night, terrified of the cost of getting sick without insurance.

“Anything that goes wrong with my health could destroy me financially,” Ms. Readling said. “I could be ruined.”

She said she had never voluntarily allowed her insurance to lapse and could not understand why she was being blackballed.

“What did I do wrong?” Ms. Readling asked. “Why am I being punished? I just don’t understand how I could have fallen through this horrible, horrible crack.”

Knowing her health benefits from her prior job would expire in January 2006, she began shopping for a new policy in May 2005. But in June 2005, she learned she had cancer.

“At that point,” Ms. Readling said, “I called everybody I could think of, begging for help. But no insurer would touch me.”

Barbara Morales Burke, the chief deputy insurance commissioner of North Carolina, said state law did not guarantee the availability of health insurance for individuals. “Most insurers decline to issue policies to those individuals whom they deem to be too risky because of their medical history,” Ms. Morales Burke said.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina will sell to anyone, regardless of the person’s medical condition, she added, but the premiums may be very high for people who have had serious illnesses.

Heidi Deja, a spokeswoman for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina, said, “Rates are based on the anticipated cost of providing care.” For people who have had serious illnesses, she said, monthly premiums “can run into the thousands of dollars.”

A 1996 federal law limited the ability of insurers to discriminate against people because of pre-existing conditions. But consumer protections are much more extensive in the group health insurance market.

“In the individual market, the federal protections provide precious little help to people seeking coverage,” said Karen L. Pollitz, a research professor at the [Georgetown University](http://www.georgetown.edu/healthpolicy/) Health Policy Institute.

When Ms. Readling was shopping for insurance, she found two responses particularly galling. One insurer, she said, suggested she return to her prior job, at a furniture company, so she could participate in its group health plan, though she loved her work as a real estate agent. Another insurer suggested she remarry her former husband to get back on his insurance plan.

Working with her doctors, Ms. Readling raced to get as many tests as possible before her coverage expired. She recalled her anxiety in the final months: “It’s like a freight train coming at you, and it’s going to get you. And there was nothing I could do.”

Ms. Readling said she was mystified by the inability of real estate agents to band together and buy health insurance as a group.

“Why can’t Realtors in North Carolina, or a few counties, have coverage under one umbrella?” she asked. “You would think that some insurance company would want our business.”

Janet S. Trautwein, executive vice president of the National Association of Health Underwriters, which represents insurance agents and brokers, said employee groups were more attractive to insurers for several reasons.

“In a group health plan,” Ms. Trautwein said, “the employer typically pays a large share of the premium, so most employees sign up as soon as they are eligible, regardless of their health status.”

“The health plan covers a mix of sick and healthy workers,” she said. “By contrast, individuals and independent contractors are more likely to defer coverage until they need it, so the pool of people insured is, over all, less healthy. Sick people consume more health care. As a result, the cost to insure them is higher.”

Though satisfied with her care, Ms. Readling continually wonders if doctors and nurses treat her differently because she is uninsured.

“Are they going to turn their nose up at you because you don’t have insurance?” Ms. Readling asked. “Will they take care of other people first? They can make more money on patients with insurance. What am I? I am just a financial loss to them.”

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## The cost of cuts in mental care

March 5, 2007

Michigan is still coping with the Engler administration's decimation of our mental health system ("Many offenders need mental care, not prison; special courts can help," Feb. 22). Legislators need to recognize that prevention is the key to keeping the mentally ill out of prisons. It's not only more humane, but it will save money and actually help the mentally ill lead productive lives.

Outpatient services include appropriate psychiatric evaluation, medication with monitoring and case management of each afflicted person. When case managers have overwhelming caseloads, all they can do is take care of the mentally ill in crisis. With no time to provide early intervention and ongoing support, the crises only increase.

At Crossroads in Detroit, about 25% of the clients have a chronic mental illness. Many of them have fallen through the cracks and/or been incarcerated. These untreated patients make our cities less safe, add to the ranks of homelessness, and put an unnecessary burden on hospital emergency wards.

**Carol Garvelink**

*Troy*

*Volunteer counselor at*

*Crossroads, Detroit*

### **Out in the cold**

The reason the prisons are full of mentally ill people is that many mental health in-patient facilities have been closed over the years, on the theory that state money could be saved by this plan. As a result, thousands of mentally ill are left out in the cold by a community mental health system that doesn't work.

Left to fend for themselves, many mentally ill turn to addiction or crime in order to survive. Additionally, thousands of mentally ill are homeless and would be better off living as in-patients in facilities (like Northville or Eloise) of days gone by.

**Robert Breckenfeld**

*Farmington Hills*

### **Price of tax cuts**

This is where tax cuts will get you. I hope the Republicans in Lansing are happy; to balance the budget the state is going to release 5,500 criminals to prey on the public and at the same time cut State Police. What sense does that make?

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has done as much as she can do to balance the budget. I would gladly pay \$20 more a month in taxes if that is what it takes to keep Michigan safe and moving forward, instead of backward.

**Rick Whitson**

*Southgate*

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## NEWS IN BRIEF: **Group home workers to be charged in deaths**

Detroit Free Press

*March 3, 2007*

Care workers at group homes in Grosse Ile and Dearborn will be charged in the deaths of two men -- one who choked after a care worker failed to puree his food, and another who died after a care worker pushed him -- according to the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.

Prosecutor Kym Worthy announced Friday that details of the charges would be made at 10 a.m. Monday.

Office spokeswoman Maria Miller said the names of the victims, group homes and care workers won't be released until then.

Both incidents occurred in 2006.

The man who choked to death was a 61-year-old resident of a Grosse Ile facility.

The other man was 38 and developmentally disabled. He died in a Dearborn home a week after a care worker pushed him down, Miller said.

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Article published Mar 4, 2007

## Michigan tax check-off helps the Children's Trust Fund

State Sen. Glenn Anderson, D-Westland, is encouraging taxpayers to help prevent child abuse locally and statewide through the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) Michigan income tax check-off.

Tax check-off donations help support local child abuse prevention agencies, including Child's Hope of Western Wayne County.

"This little check-off is an easy way to make a big difference," said Anderson, who represents Livonia, Westland, Redford and Garden City. "The children most helped by the efforts of the Children's Trust Fund are those most likely to be hard hit by our impending budget cuts, including cuts to the Department of Human Services and the Department of Community Health."

The check-off can be found on line 30 of the Michigan income tax form. The minimum \$5 donation is tax deductible in the following tax year.

For more information about CTF, call (800) CHILDREN or visit the Web site, [www.michigan.gov/ctf](http://www.michigan.gov/ctf).

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Article published Mar 4, 2007

## Marleau encourages support of Child Abuse Advocacy group

State Rep. Jim Marleau is encouraging taxpayers to consider donating to the Child Abuse & Neglect Council of Oakland County through the Children's Trust Fund income tax check-off.

"I hope taxpayers able to support this cause do so," said Marleau, R-Lake Orion. "The Children's Trust Fund and the Child Abuse & Neglect Council can make a significant difference in the prevention of child abuse and neglect, as an ounce of prevention can be worth a pound of cure."

Residents of Oakland County contributed more than \$74,000 in 2006 to benefit the Child Abuse & Neglect Council of Oakland County, an organization aimed at stopping child abuse and neglect by providing advocacy and prevention programs. A total of 313 residents in the 46th House District, which Marleau represents, sent more than \$5,200 to the cause.

The Children's Trust Fund of Michigan is a statewide nonprofit organization created in 1982 by the Michigan Legislature for the protection of Michigan's children from child abuse and neglect.

It provides grants for public education, training and technical assistance, and funds child abuse prevention programs and services across the state.

The check-off can be found on line 30 of the Michigan income tax form. The minimum \$5 donation is tax-deductible in the following tax year.

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Article published Mar 4, 2007

## Legislator looks at supporting the arts

BY SARA CALLENDER  
STAFF WRITER

Jane Linn, executive director of the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center, wants to promote arts and culture.

And now a local lawmaker is lending a hand.

"We are very grateful to anyone who supports the arts," Linn said. "It's not just about drawing, etc. It's about the education part, as well. It helps understand our culture."

State Rep. Fran Amos, R-Waterford, recently introduced a bill to create a check-off box on state income tax forms that would allow residents to contribute a portion of their income tax return in support of the Michigan Council on Arts and Cultural Affairs. Amos represents the 43rd District, which includes the northeast portion of West Bloomfield.

The proposal will cost the state nothing and will be funded entirely by voluntary taxpayer contributions.

"Michigan's arts and cultural gems cannot be left behind as they are an essential ingredient in Michigan's economic development strategy," said Amos, the vice chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on History, Arts and Libraries. "They greatly enhance our state's quality of life, which is often considered one of the most important factors in an individual's or business's relocation decision. Enhancing our state's quality of life will show businesses and individuals we are committed to making Michigan a much more welcoming relocation destination."

The MCACA distributes a variety of arts grants to nonprofit organizations across the state, including dance groups, Interlochen Academy band camp, the Detroit Zoo and the Detroit Institute of Arts.

The bills allow taxpayers to contribute \$2 or more of their annual return to the organization. Gabe Basso, Amos' legislative director, said it's difficult to determine how much money the tax program would bring in to the MCACA.

"It's never been done before," Basso said. "We have looked at how much money other programs have gained via income tax check-offs."

During the last fiscal year, for example, about \$390,000 was raised for the Michigan Children's Trust Fund, which works to prevent child abuse and neglect. A total of 28,613 taxpayers contributed to the fund.

Amos said the bill is part of the larger picture for economic recovery in Michigan.

"There is no quick-fix to our state's economy," Amos said. "Change is a process, and thus reforming our economy will not happen in one day. I firmly believe that one area that will help turn our state around is to make it an attractive and vibrant place to live by enhancing its arts and cultural institutions."

The BBAC annually receives a \$15,000 grant from the MCACA to support its 500 classes for adults and children. The BBAC also sponsors the spring Fine Arts Festival in downtown Birmingham and hosts 25-30 free art exhibits and summer camps for residents, including many from West Bloomfield.

Two separate attempts to pass a regional culture tax failed in 2000 and 2002, but this measure wouldn't need voter approval.

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# **MPSC Issues Annual Report**

MIRS, March 3, 2007

Michigan Public Service Commission Chair Peter **LARK** today released the Commission's Annual 2006 report to Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** and the Legislature.

Releasing the report, Lark noted that the Commission's actions in protecting consumers.

"From awarding \$83 million in grants to low-income and senior citizen customers to cutting electric rates for Detroit Edison residential and business customers, the MPSC has continued to safeguard the interests of utility customers in Michigan," Lark said.

Highlights of the report include:

- The Commission continued to help needy Michigan residents by awarding \$70 million from the low-income and energy efficiency fund. The awards provide immediate assistance for heating needs as well as longer term assistance in reducing future heating costs for low-income and senior citizens.
- The Commission continued consumer outreach efforts by hosting statewide consumer forums, making its Commission meetings available via podcast, handling 41,000 calls on its toll free line and assisted consumers and businesses with more than 11,000 electric and natural gas and 7,500 telecommunications complaints and inquiries.
- The Commission issued 438 orders, consisting of 164 communications, 165 electric, 71 natural gas, and 38 motor carrier orders.
- In August, the Commission approved a settlement agreement that reduced Detroit Edison's electric rates for residential and business customers by \$78.75 million, for an annual decrease of about \$6 per residential customer.

The entire report is available online at [michigan.gov/mpsc](http://michigan.gov/mpsc)

**www.news8austin.com**

## **Lawmakers push foster care bills in wake of child deaths**

Updated: 3/2/2007 5:41:35 PM

By: Associated Press

Two years after lawmakers overhauled and privatized the state's foster care system, they are looking to redefine the rights of foster children and beef up the state Department of Family and Protective Services' management role.

State figures show that at least 13 children in foster care have died of abuse or neglect by foster caregivers since 2003. Lawmakers are calling for tougher state oversight and more rigorous background checks of foster families.

Under current law, placement agencies must examine criminal backgrounds, but they don't have to check whether police have visited a home on disturbance calls.

Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Lewisville, says the oversight that should be taking place has broken down in our foster system.

Rep. Helen Giddings, D-Dallas, says she is drafting a bill that would require foster parents to disclose police visits. It would also create a database by which state workers could track police visits to foster homes, Giddings said.

Critics welcome the attention being paid to foster care reform but say the lawmakers' efforts are belated.

Rep. Eddie Rodriguez, D-Austin, and Sen Carlos Uresti, D-San Antonio, filed companion pieces of legislation providing a statement of children's rights while in foster care.

HB 1752 and SB 805 would guarantee the right to be free from discrimination or harassment based on gender, race, religion, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, or HIV status; to attend school and participate in sports, clubs and other extracurricular activities; and to make confidential complaints to DFPS regarding violations of their rights.

 For more information

Here's a look at the number of children who have died while in foster care in recent years.

2006 figures are not yet available.

2005 - 11 deaths related to abuse or neglect. Three were caused by foster caregivers.

2004 - 15 deaths related to abuse or neglect. Four were caused by foster caregivers.

2003 - Six deaths related to abuse or neglect. Three were caused by foster caregivers.

Source: *Texas Department of Family and Protective Services*

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Published March 4, 2007

## **Eight new CASA volunteers sworn in**

CHARLOTTE — After much hard work and 35 hours of training, eight new CASA volunteer advocates recently raised their right hands and swore to fulfill the duties of the office of the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Kids.

Eaton County Judge Michael Skinner swore in the new CASA volunteers to be the "eyes and ears of the court ... and the anchors in the lives of Eaton County's abused and neglected children."

The newest volunteers bring the total number of Eaton County advocates to 36 serving approximately 56 children. As of this January there are 90 children under the protection of the Eaton County court system who need a CASA volunteer.

"I am so pleased to see so many good people elect to volunteer with such a worthy organization and give of themselves." Judge Skinner went on to say, "The most valuable things you will do is be a constant in the lives of these children...I can't stress how import being there for the children is for them...The information that you provide the court is valuable," said Judge Skinner.

Brandy Hatt of the Eaton County Foster Parent Association added, "Foster parents value the work done by CASA and just one hour a week makes a huge difference for these children. Thank you."

CASA for Kids is a non-profit organization that recruits and trains volunteers to advocate for children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect. A CASA volunteer's role is to visit with the children on their assigned case once every 7 to 10 days and provide an independent assessment to the court about all aspects of a child's life.

The CASA volunteer assessment reflects the strengths and needs of the child, the child's family, and caregivers. CASA volunteer recommendations are totally independent of any state agency and are predicated solely upon the child's best interests.

Each CASA volunteer advocate receives approximately 35 hours for training in court procedures, child development, child welfare policies, family dynamics, communication and more. Following the intensive training CASA volunteers are sworn into service as officers of the Circuit Family Court, Juvenile Division. Each volunteer is generally assigned to one family for the duration of the legal court case, which averages 12 to 18 months. It is a CASA mandate to provide an independent assessment of the case and make written recommendation to the court based on the child's best interest.

The children of Eaton County who have been abused or neglected by their caregivers are in need of a voice in court to testify on their behalf and in their best interest. There are many different types of volunteering opportunities with the CASA program.

For more information, contact Kim or Michelle at (517) 543-3974 or e-mail the CASA staff at [casa@eatoncounty.org](mailto:casa@eatoncounty.org).



## Suspect files plea, faces long sentence

Monday, March 05, 2007

**LaNIA COLEMAN**

### THE SAGINAW NEWS

**BAD AXE --** A "significant drug bust" could end with a significant sentence for a suspect who received a plea deal.

Anthony M. Spencer agreed last week to plead guilty to possessing less than 50 grams of cocaine with intent to deliver, the Huron Daily Tribune reported.

In return for the plea, which could put the 27-year-old Port Austin Township man behind bars for up to 20 years, prosecutors dropped charges of possessing less than 25 grams of a controlled substance, possessing marijuana and maintaining a drug house, the newspaper reported.

Spencer faces sentencing Thursday, April 19, in Huron County Circuit Court.

Huron County sheriff's investigators claim Spencer was a link between larger distributors in major metropolitan areas and buyers in northwestern Huron County, Saginaw News records show.

Police arrested Spencer in December during a raid on an apartment at 3221 Port Austin. Authorities have said Spencer and his pregnant girlfriend lived in the apartment.

Spencer's 25-year-old girlfriend gave birth to the couple's son, Anthony, on Jan. 17, News records show.

She now could face charges because the infant was born addicted to drugs.

The infant remains in a Huron County foster care home.

State Department of Corrections records show Spencer has two previous convictions.

In March 2004, a Huron County jury convicted him of assaulting, resisting or obstructing a police officer causing injury. He received a 14-month to four-year sentence in October 2004, but Corrections officials discharged him in June 2005 when he received a lesser sentence on appeal.

In December 1998, a Genesee County jury found Spencer guilty of escaping from a juvenile facility in August 1997. Authorities released him after he served three years and three months of a two- to four-year sentence. v

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Lansing State Journal

Published March 2, 2007

## **Have you considered helping a child in need?**

By Angelita Pedelty  
Youth Guidance Foster Care

Team up with Youth Guidance Foster Care!

According to the Michigan Federation for Children and Families, approximately 28 children enter foster care per day in the state of Michigan.

These children range in age from birth to age 19. They come from diverse backgrounds and each child is an unique individual.

Sixty-one percent of these children are placed with private, nonprofit foster care agencies and Youth Guidance Foster Care is one of them.

Established in 1982, Youth Guidance Foster Care is a private, non-profit, Christian foster care agency located in Battle Creek. YGFC staff goes above and beyond the call to meet the needs of foster families and foster children.

Families licensed with Youth Guidance Foster Care receive professional and personalized services such as: continuous, weekly support from case workers and agency staff; 24 hour/ 7 days a week Emergency and Crisis Support; and pre-placement visits with the foster child and foster family, allowing the child and family to get to know one another before placement commitments are made; and specialized training.

We are currently recruiting families and individuals who would like to provide fulltime foster care and/or short-term respite care for young children, teenagers, and sibling groups.

Log on to [www.citylinc.org/ygfc.html](http://www.citylinc.org/ygfc.html) or email [apedelty@citylinc.org](mailto:apedelty@citylinc.org) for more information.

Come join us for a Q & A session about foster care. We will be providing information on what it is like to be a foster parent and a teacher, coach, or neighbor to a foster family and foster child at 7 p.m. March 15 at Olivet Congregational Church (Outside of the Wee-Ones classroom) or from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. March 22 at Bellevue High School Community Room.

For more information or to RSVP, contact Angelita Pedelty at 269-969-9438.

# County computer system problem solved

Published Friday, March 2, 2007 3:52:04 PM Central Time

By ERIC HJERSTEDT SHARP

Ironwood Daily Globe Staff Writer

BESSEMER -- Gogebic County government's computer system is operating normally again as of 2 p.m. Thursday.

Most computers at the county courthouse, including the system in the sheriff's department, were infected Feb. 21 with a Trojan horse virus named "w32.Rinbot.b", according to the county's emergency management coordinator Jim Loeper. Loeper was involved in the around-the-clock effort in restoring the system which had been down since last Thursday.

The virus, a worm that spreads through network shares and exploits system vulnerabilities, was first found on the prosecutor's computer system, and may have been the same virus that infected more than 800 computers and servers throughout the State of Michigan last week, Loeper added.

According to Loeper, the virus may have been initiated throughout systems from unknown parties in the United Kingdom.

"Upon close inspection, it doesn't look like we lost data," Loeper said.

Loeper told county commissioners at the county board meeting Wednesday night he hoped to have the system up by the end of the week, and said everything could be up by Thursday. He also told board members data from the county's treasury department had been restored.

At Loeper's request, the county board voted unanimously to grant emergency services \$3,000 for a back-up computer to add redundancy to the county's IT system to prevent future incidents that could compromise the server.

Deputies at the sheriff's department have not been able to file reports on department computers since Thursday, and will have to transcribe their handwritten reports now that the computers are up, Loeper said.

Information technology manager Brad Noren, Loeper, as well as outside consultants, had worked on the server during and after regular business hours. Loeper did not have an estimate of the amount of overtime spent in solving the glitch.

"It's been quite a week," Loeper said.

A FBI investigation into the virus worm infection was initiated earlier in the week, but no specific answers have yet been found, Loeper said Thursday. According to Loeper, about 70 counties have also been infected with the virus.

### **State of Michigan's role**

The role the state's server played in the glitches was downplayed by Kurt Weiss, communication's director with Michigan's IT Department in Lansing. In a telephone interview Thursday with the Daily Globe, Weiss said about 800 computers and servers within the state system were infected by the same virus, a new virus which technicians call a bot.net virus.

"The virus' purpose is to go out on the network and babble, tie up the network so data cannot get through," Weiss said.

Weiss said the state system was infected last Wednesday (about the same time Gogebic County first noticed their problem), but said his department had the state's computers and servers back up by last Friday.

"The shut down happened at three main points of impact: The state's unemployment insurance agency, the secretary of state branch offices and 30 branch offices of the department of human services," Weiss said.

"The shut down started about started about 1 o'clock Wednesday afternoon," Weiss added. "We were able to stop its spread and block it from ports in about 20 minutes, but there were already 800 machines (computers and servers) infected.

By last Friday, however, the state had its system up and running. Weiss said he had not heard about Gogebic County's specific problem this past week, but added the state and counties do not necessarily work in tandem on IT projects.

"At this point and time, it is difficult to tell how or where the infection came from," Weiss said. "We know it came from someone who dialed in to the state network, and they may have been unaware they were infected. No personal infection or data was compromised."

Weiss said computers from across the country have been infected with the virus, and it was not initiated on any of the state's systems.



## **Twenty-Four Human Services Workers Honored**

MIRS, March 3, 2007

Twenty-four Michigan Department of Human Services employees from around the state are winners of a "Star" award for their participating in the Paternity Establishment Percentage - or PEP - team.

"The PEP Team helps increase paternity established each year for children of unwed parents," said Marianne **UDOW**, director of the Department of Human Services. "Formed three years ago, the team developed and implemented plans that led to improved paternity establishment.

"Star" awards are given to Human Service employees and teams from around the state for their good work, teamwork and providing quality service.

DHS also announced that:

- 14 employees received "Star" awards for the agency's Technical Assistance Team or TAT Training Unit
- Six employees received "Star" awards for participation in the Weatherization Day Team.



For the week ending 3/2/2007, Vol. XXVIII, No. 8

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### **APHSa Spring Conference Canceled Due to Emergency Hotel Closure**

Due to the presence of a contagious intestinal virus at the Hyatt Regency Hotel Crystal City in Arlington, Va., the local health department has closed the facility. Because of the uncertainty of locating another hotel with adequate sleeping rooms and meeting space to accommodate our needs, we had to cancel the APhSA Spring Conference and National Council Meeting that was scheduled to begin on March 4. We apologize to those who planned to attend for the inconvenience. We are studying issues of liability and reimbursement of expenses incurred as a result of this situation.

### **APHSa, Anti-Hunger Groups Call For Higher Food Stamp Benefits, More Simplification**

On Feb. 26, the American Public Human Services Association, America's Second Harvest and the Food Research and Action Center issued a joint statement urging Congress to make "substantial improvements" in the Food Stamp Program as the program is reauthorized as part of this year's farm bill. The organizations call for changes to expand program access, simplify program administration and move benefit levels closer to adequacy for a healthy diet. The statement notes that 35 million people face hunger in the United States and that only 60 percent of those eligible for the program actually participate. It highlights certain groups that are excluded despite their need, such as poor working families with resources slightly in excess of outdated program limits; many legal immigrants; and poor jobless adults seeking employment. The statement notes that the elderly are particularly discouraged by low benefit levels and resource limits, and should have nationwide access to programs now operating in some states that grant "one-stop" access to food stamps and Supplemental Security Income. The groups also call for more demonstration programs to test food stamp access for those who come into food pantries and other nontraditional contact points in their communities. Other proposals named include additional administrative funding for states and a higher minimum benefit. The full statement will be available on the [APHSa web site](#).

### **Harkin Urges More Nutrition Funding in Farm Bill**

On Feb. 27, Senate Agriculture Chairman Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) said he hopes the Senate Budget Committee will provide more money for nutrition programs in the fiscal year 2008 budget resolution. Harkin, who spoke to a group attending the annual conference of the Food Research and Action Center and America's Second Harvest, said that the commodity title of the farm bill (which will include reauthorization of the FSP and other federal nutrition programs) has enough funding already but that nutrition programs need more funding to help recipients cope with higher food prices. Harkin added that he wants to raise the FSP asset limit and index it to inflation, and that he wants to encourage healthier food choices with a "bonus" for the purchase of fruits and vegetables.

### **House Panel Hears Testimony on Head Start Reauthorization**

On February 28, the House Education and Labor Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education Subcommittee held a hearing to discuss improving Head Start, which is scheduled for reauthorization in 2008. In his opening statement, Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Dale Kildee (D-Mich.) expressed his opposition to the president's proposal to reduce funding for the program by \$100 million. Other participating members included Reps. Paul Sarbanes (D-Md.), Lynn Woolsey (D-Calif.), Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), Ric Keller (R-Fla.), Robert Scott (D-Va.), Ruben Hinojosa (D-Calif.), Donald Payne (D-N.J.), Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.), and Ranking Member Michael Castle (R-Del.). Witnesses addressed Head Start's positive developmental, cognitive and social impacts on young children as well as the range of services made available to families through the program. Pearlle Elloie, director of the Office for Children, Youth and Families Total Community Action in New Orleans, spoke about the integral role Head Start has played in helping families and communities in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and its ongoing attention to emergency preparedness. Ellen Frede, who serves as the co-director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, discussed collaborative funding relationships between Head Start, state pre-kindergarten and child care, including many of the challenges involved. She said, "It is especially challenging for Head Start agencies that use child care dollars to extend the day to handle the conflict created when a child's parent loses her eligibility for the child care slot because she has lost her job." She recommended that Head Start agencies that use child-care dollars to provide an extended day be allowed to count this subsidy toward their local match, and ensure that the subsidy continue as long as the child is eligible for Head Start. Other witnesses spoke about the federal monitoring process and the dimensions of local Head Start staffing, training, and technical assistance needs. [More details](#).

### **Governors Focus on Health Issues at Winter Meeting**

The National Governors Association met this week in Washington for its annual winter meeting. While they were in town, the governors weighed in with Congress on several health care-related issues and met with President Bush and administration officials to discuss his new health care initiative, among other issues. On Feb. 23, NGA's Health and Human Services Committee Chair Gov. John Corzine (D-N.J.) and Vice Chair Jim Douglass (R-Vt.) sent a letter to House and Senate leaders opposing the president's Medicaid administrative changes to limit costs for public health care providers and changes in the definition of "public" status. The governors asked that the congressional leaders pass legislation to prevent the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services from moving forward with the proposed rule. Govs. Corzine and

Douglass also urged Congress to immediately address State Children's Health Insurance Program funding shortfalls and to work to ensure a "timely and successful" reauthorization of the SCHIP program.

During the NGA meeting, Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt highlighted implementing electronic medical records, establishing quality standards, comparing episodes of care, and creating incentives that will make individuals drive quality and reduce cost. Leavitt focused on the three tools available to help states create more palatable health care marketplaces: (1) redirecting money currently spent on medical bills for the uninsured to make coverage more affordable; (2) the new health care tax reforms; and (3) affordable choice grants. He also stressed that states will be eligible for affordable choice grants if they develop an appropriate "plan of affordability" and that each state must define its own basic plan.

The chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee, Rep. Frank Pallone (D-N.J.), spoke to the governors about the committee's concerns with the president's Medicaid and SCHIP proposals, saying that the Medicaid proposals were "dead on arrival." Regarding SCHIP, he said Congress is likely to address the shortfalls during consideration of a supplemental funding bill for FY 2007 in early March. He also discussed his primary principles for reauthorization, which include undertaking a comprehensive reauthorization of the program, not cutting Medicaid to pay for SCHIP, and providing flexibility to states. Pallone added that "flexibility is secondary to sufficient funding" for the program, and that by flexibility he meant the ability for states to do things to make the program more efficient and be more targeted.

#### **CMS Releases State Medicaid Director Letter on Citizenship**

On Feb. 22, CMS released a new State Medicaid Director letter on citizenship. This letter references the changes recently made by the passage of the Tax Relief and Health Care Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-432). Specifically addressed in this letter are the changes made by replacing the word "alien" with the phrase "individual declaring to be a citizen or national of the United States" and exempting two additional groups from the citizenship documentary evidence requirements. These groups individuals receiving disability insurance benefits under section 223 of the Act or monthly benefits under section 202 of the Act, based on their disability; and individuals with respect to whom child welfare services are made available under part B of Title IV on the basis of being a child in foster care, or adoption, or to whom foster care assistance is made available under part E of title IV of the Act. The letter is [available online](#).

#### **U.S. Health Care Spending Projected to Double, Rate of Medicaid Spending Slowing**

On Feb. 21, the Office of the Actuary at CMS released new figures on U.S. health care spending. According to the National Health Statistics Group within the Office of the Actuary, over the next decade, spending is expected to double from today's level of \$2.1 trillion to \$4.1 trillion. Health spending will account for 16 percent of the gross domestic product. The average annual growth in health care spending is projected to remain relatively steady, at 6.9 percent, from 2006 through 2016. According to preliminary data, between 2005 and 2006 the growth rate is expected to drop slightly from 6.9 percent to 6.8 percent, the fourth consecutive year of a decrease in spending. The report indicated that Medicaid spending in 2006 is expected to be similar to that in 2005, reaching \$313.5 billion in 2006. The slowdown in Medicaid growth is attributed in part to a slower growth in enrollment and a deceleration in payments to physicians and hospitals. The researchers noted that even though Medicaid growth is slowing to record low levels not seen since the late 1990s, state and federal Medicaid spending is expected to start climbing again, to 7.3 percent in 2007, and grow at an average of 8.1 percent per year through 2016. [More information](#).